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How Country Music Can Improve Your Marriage

Greg Hansen



BYU STUDIES
SYMPOSIUM

For decades I have been on a quest to become the Perfect Husband, the Ultimate Man, the Guy My Wife Dreams Of. Unfortunately, she's still dreaming. I've read all the self-help books, seen all the relationship movies, and studied every "this is what a real man should be" talk ever given by anyone with Elder or President in front of his name. I have worked hard to become kind, sensitive, gallant, spiritual, inspiring, dedicated, and romantic. With practice, I've even gotten better at crying (women seem to like that, as long as it's not when you're supposed to be saving them.)

No matter what I do, however, I come in conflict with my inner frontiersman. I seem to find alluring those bygone days when strength and honor and chivalry still meant something.

The Classic Inner Conflict

When we first moved to our little horse ranch, I discovered what all residents here have in common—our famous Eagle Mountain mud. It's so bad in the wet season, each morning I look out the window and count the horses' ears that are still sticking out of the ground to make sure they're all there.

Back then, I brought out the first load of hay in my Ford F350 one-ton, full-size-bed diesel pickup truck and promptly sank up to the axles on the dirt road to my barn, even with four-wheel drive. The homes here are spread out so far there was no one around to help. Finally, after a while, along came a nice lady driving another pickup. She stopped and said sweetly, "Need some help?"

I could see she was holding back a snicker under her breath.

"Yes, Ma'am," I mumbled.

Being prepared for most things, I had forty feet of steel tow chain in my truck box, which was about how far off the main road I was. She swung around, and told me to hook up to her trailer hitch. Staying on the asphalt, she easily yanked my heavily loaded truck back on the road like it was nothing. They make real women out here.

But here's my point: I didn't know whether to be more embarrassed about being saved by a woman or by the fact that she was driving a Dodge Ram.

Gender Role Confusion

This confusion about what an ideal man should be is more pervasive these days than we men let on. That's because men don't talk about stuff like that. So, I *will* talk about it, because I'm still working on becoming a Highly Sensitive but Manly Guy.

For example, I've learned from my many years in the music business that good values and much wisdom can still be found in the lyrics of country music. It's an acquired taste, to be sure, but since I've sunk so deeply into the ooze of frontier living, I've found out that it's the White Man's soul music. I still remember my shock when I first discovered that musicians, who are supposedly great artists, belong to the same union as dockworkers and truckers. Kind of takes the stuffing out of a fellow's shirt.

Nevertheless, all the great Everyman themes are there in country music: songs about being a good husband or a good father, love, freedom, honesty, and respecting your elders; about knowing who you are and having a good family, a good wife, and gratitude for God's blessings. Country music has its share of redneck and drinking songs, but overall it has more values-based songs than any other genre. Though I haven't taken an official survey, I'm pretty confident making this claim; there are very few kinds of music I haven't written, produced, and arranged these last twenty-five years. So, naturally, I turn to music to solve the world's problems both now and forever. (It should be pointed out here that, to my knowledge, only three careers are mentioned scripturally in the next life with any certainty: missionary, musician, and teacher.)

Having built on that solidly unstable but authoritative foundation, I will now get to the real message of this essay: how country songs can make your marriage better.

Memorizing Song Lyrics

Before becoming the Highly Improved Guy I am today, I would come home after a long day in the recording studio, ready to de-stress and download, my full ration of words completely used up for the day. My wife would want to talk, but I just wanted the remote.

Now, because I have memorized so many country songs on the way home, I always have the right thing to say. This has the effect of making me seem wise and romantic, preventing that annoying Empty Head Syndrome.

When she tells me about the troubles of her day, I quote the appropriate country lyrics. For example, when she's upset, I say:

[Honey,] loving you,
It's what I do.
It's the one thing I've found I can put my heart into.
It's who I am.
I'm a lucky man,
Living the life I choose.
Loving you,
It's what I do.¹

It helps that she doesn't know any of these country songs. But if she mentions how frustratingly stubborn I am, I say:

All of that stubbornness melts away,
When I wake with [your] head on my shoulder,
And I know I've got to love [you]
Until my life is through.
What else can I do?
Oh, I love [you]!²

When she tells me she's glad I'm home, I say:

The view I love the most
Is from my front porch looking in.³

Then, when the kids tell me all the good things they accomplished, I say:

That's something to be proud of.
That's a life you can hang your hat on.⁴

Other Important Applications

Songs also help me remember to get my wife flowers sometimes on the way home.

Every now and then, on my way home,
I stop by a place where the wildflowers grow, and I pick a few,
'Cause she don't tell me to.⁵

Or when she says I'm lost and won't ask directions, I say:

God blessed the broken road
That led me straight to you.⁶

Even though he's not a singer, sometimes a little Zane Grey helps when she's figuratively got a burr under her saddle: Even though I'm a "fire-eatin' gun-slinger, who's gone out to meet the worst of men an' come back—why, I tremble at your step an' I see your face in the clouds an' hear your voice in the wind. Don't ever miss that, lady."⁷

It Must Be Done Properly

Since lawyers are so much a part of life these days, I will add this disclaimer: improper use of country lyrics in relationships can be dangerous. You must use the right song for the proper application. This became painfully clear when my friend Spencer decided to try out my new marital relationship country lyrics cure-all.

He went home, ready to watch the game on TV, but his wife wanted to talk. So he quoted Alison Krauss singing:

You say it best when you say nothing at all.⁸

Spencer has never fully recovered.

Greg Hansen is an award-winning record producer, composer/arranger, and recording artist. He is the music review editor for *BYU Studies*. He has two new online music companies, *LDSMusicNow.com*, for easy LDS sheet music downloads, and *LDSTunesNow.com*, for LDS music mp3 downloads. This essay was presented at the 2010 *BYU Studies Symposium*.

1. "It's What I Do," written by Tom Shapiro and Chuck Jones, sung by Billy Dean, single released by Capitol #58526, January 1996.

2. "She Don't Tell Me To," written by Bob DiPiero, Tom Shapiro, and Rivers Rutherford, sung by Montgomery Gentry, single released by Columbia, October 25, 2005.

3. "My Front Porch Looking In," written by Richie McDonald, Frank J. Myers, and Don Pfrimmer, sung by Lonestar, single released by BNA, March 10, 2003.

4. "Something to Be Proud Of," written by Jeffrey Steele and Chris Wallin, sung by Montgomery Gentry, single released by Columbia, May 9, 2005.

5. "She Don't Tell Me To," written by Bob DiPiero, Tom Shapiro, and Rivers Rutherford, sung by Montgomery Gentry, single released by Columbia, October 25, 2005.

6. "Bless the Broken Road," written by Marcus Hummon and members of the country music group Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, sung by Rascal Flatts, single released by Lyric Street, November 1, 2004.

7. Zane Grey, *Raiders of Spanish Peaks* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1938), 154. The quotation is actually in third person, but it's okay for a romantic guy like me to take a little poetic license.

8. "When You Say Nothing at All," written by Paul Overstreet and Don Schlitz, originally sung by Keith Whitley, RCA, September 1988, sung by Alison Krauss, album *Now That I've Found You: A Collection*, Rounder, February 7, 1995.